

ラブライブ! *School idol diary*



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音乃夏

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Warning: Quality of chapters 1-6 may be pretty bad

translations by Tronpyon/Takashi Nakamura(1-6) and Daxing Dan(for Chapter 7) Proofreading by various people

Chapter 1: A Day in the Sonoda Household

[YA, MEN!!]

[YA! KOTE, MEN, DO]

In the Sonoda Household, the mornings start with vigorous Kendo practice. *Chouyaku* practice swings 100 times, *shomen* practice swings 100 times, from crouching to standing up *suriashi* in 3 successions.

The sunlight is starting to grow brighter and the early morning is fleeting in this hour. Tightening the cord of my hakama, I think to myself, "It feels good to practice in the dojo". I've felt this way ever since... who knows how long ago.

June is also the start of the early summer season.

In this season of the early sunrise, even on hot days one can still feel refreshed and cool. But if it were winter, daybreak wouldn't start at 5AM. While the cold air that seems to waft through the early morning darkness shrinks, I change into my uniform. Though I switched on the barely functional heater, I took a step into the very wide dojo which felt like going through a cold sea. The freezing cold silence pierces my body. On those seasons, the bottom of my feet went red because of the frostbite from the cold floor when I was small. There were times that I cried from the pain. While I was crying from the pain from stepping on the dojo's floor, I complained that it hurts. My father, who was the instructor, kept saying "Stop complaining! Just rub some medicine on it later".

After the morning practice, I used just a tender drop of liver oil. It was a sight for sore eyes at the time. My grandmother gave me 2 pieces of sweet white candy that she had set aside as my reward for the morning practice. I can't receive those candies during this season though. It wasn't until much later when I found out those were the vitamins for frostbite.



To me, those were kind memories.

And so, the days where I was a small crybaby passed.

The current me won't cry like that anymore.

The soles of my feet became strong enough that no matter how cold the winter may be, it cannot be affected by frostbite.



These days, I can only do standard, no-partner practice.

Ever since I received a dan rank, I've been seeing my father lesser every day even though he used to accompany me. The dojo soon became a self-training place for myself only. The untouched day starts now, in this time of the morning. My new mind and body is ready to face it at anytime like always . It is time to make sure of the place for myself.

[YA! MEN!]

At the last part of the practice, I give my thanks to the dojo I used for this morning's practice. I used a dust cloth to wipe the dojo's floor.

I roll up the sleeves of my hakama a bit . Something that looks like a young priest running around may look weird but it was good training for my legs and hips. Honestly, if the other µ's members did this, I'm sure it would be great. Unfortunately, the school's dojo is completely full from the other clubs' activities.

"Oh Umi-san, if you are done with the dojo how about you show me your training from before?" said my mother. After using the dojo, I took a light shower in the room at the end of the corridor.

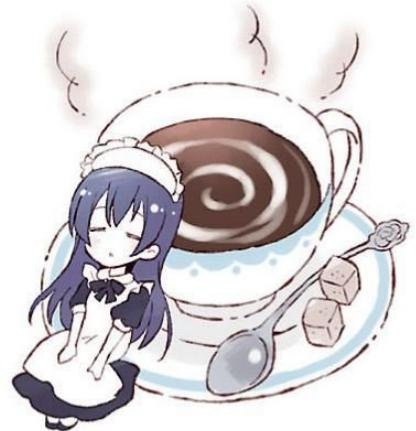
"Yes, master"

I politely bowed my head to my master. Mother didn't speak. On the morning where my test was being held, µ's has no morning practice so I still have time. My mother is a kind person but when it comes to training, she is my respected master. The only thing I can do is say "yes" to her and bow as her disciple.

While I listened to the flowing song of the "Plum's Spring", I dance without any obstructive thoughts. The sunlight that enters the training room from the windows gradually got stronger. Even after wearing a slightly loose cotton yukata, my body still felt like sweating. Now, my mood got lighter within the comfort of my training clothes.

Suddenly, excessive thoughts float inside my head. I can't. I'm going to get scolded. I accidentally catch a glance of my mother who was sitting near the edge of the dancing stage. She closed her eyes and just started swaying some time ago. She must be listening to the music attentively. Suddenly, I felt like I'm about to laugh. I'm going to face certain death. Could mother have fallen asleep with all that sunlight hitting her? No, I'm sure my dancing reached the passing mark. I closed my eyes in relief.

My mother is an only daughter born in this dojo and the head of the Sonoda style Japanese Dance school.



In other words, mother is the current head of the family. My father took my mother's last name. The Sonoda family was originally a warrior family. However, the family lineage were mostly females. There weren't many men born. Often, son-in-laws are taken into the family rather than relatives inheriting. But this time is different, my mother inherited the dojo by herself. That's why this place is originally a Japanese dance school.

But when my mother met my father by coincidence and got married, father also made this place a martial arts dojo. On this wood floor martial arts dojo, one side is made into a dance stage. Right now it's used as a Japanese dance stage. Furthermore, when you open the inner lining of the stage, it can be used as an archery range and the other side of the wide garden can be used as target practice for archery training.

My father is a martial artist, mother is a dance instructor.

To be honest, I want to be father's successor. However, I'm the one expected to become the next Japanese dance instructor. Of course, because this martial arts dojo/Japanese dance school exists, I don't think there is anything wrong with also succeeding my father. That being said, I took a look at how my sleeping mother was doing. To be honest, I don't know what to do with their expectations for me. As soon as the music ended, mother opened her eyes.

"Splendid! To give you a short review, you did well. If you could keep this up, you will make a fine successor of the Sonoda style. And with that, since we held the morning training for today, we don't have to practice tonight. Tonight, I shall be going out with your father for a while."

I thought "So that's what this was for."

I took a look at my mother and kept thinking. Now that I think about it, Father's birthday is coming soon. The thought of it made me happy all of a sudden. Also, it looks like I can spend time with the other members after the practice after school.

"Would it be okay if I go and have dinner with Honoka and the others for tonight?"

"I wouldn't mind at all. You two are close as always, aren't you? It's great that you have a good friend like her. At this rate, even when you get married and when you give birth to your children, you two would still be together. Just like Kii-chan from 'Homura' and I. It's like you two were childhood friends even while you were both still inside me and Kii-chan. When we found out that the children that we were pregnant with at the same time became classmates, we were really surprised."

As I listen to my mother while she smiles as she talks, I'm a bit fed up with that story. Honoka and I are different from Mother and her friend. As frustrating as it is that I can't boldly deny it, I have to prepare for school, so I hurriedly left in front of Mother.

Marriage? Children? I really cannot think of anything about those right now. It's troubling to talk about things that far into the future. On the contrary, I should think of the place where we gather, the school. Even though we meet everyday, it is only for the sake of doing our best to save Otonokizaka Academy from closing.

Still, Mother only sees things her way.

The heart of a child with a wisdom tooth.

Am I really a pessimist like Kotori said?

On the way home after practice.

"I'm so full! Practice really empties your stomach, doesn't it?" Honoka said as she pats her stomach. I started to laugh without thinking.

"Honoka, you look just like a *tanuki* if you push your stomach out like that."

Dinnertime has passed and it's already very dark out. I giggled at the thought of a slightly droopy-eyed HonoTanuki. The more I think about it, she really does resemble a *tanuki*. I can't stop laughing. Honoka is really similar to a large, ceramic tanuki from Shigaraki that you place in your backyard. The ones I played house with when I was small.

"Umi-chan! You don't have to laugh that much! I thought this was a rare chance for us to hang out since you had time."

"Sorry *giggle*"

I smiled when the thought of Honoka happily eating fries by herself came up on my mind when we stopped by at the family restaurant together with everyone after we practiced.

"I had fun today, Umi-chan!" Honoka said while her hair sways as she jumps. She has a smile that is like a full moon.

"W-What is it? All of a sudden..."

"It was very fun! Just like the old times. You're too busy training at home so you usually didn't have time to drop by with everyone on the way home. Oh, sorry about that Umi-chan, I was just being selfish..."

"T-That's...."

I didn't really mind what she said, but I noticed Honoka looking a bit down.

We go back and forth from our local residence to the local school. We all walked home together by foot starting from the restaurant near the train station. Our houses were separated in many directions, but at last, the two of us, the childhood friends ever since a long time ago whose houses are the closest to each other, Honoka and I were left.

"After all, Umi-chan is the heiress to the Sonoda Dojo. That's why you have archery training, kendo training and there's also Japanese dance. Everyday, you have a lot of things that you must do. Now, because of μ's, you're busier than



ever. For me, the club activities are a lot, but Umi-chan does more than that during your training at home. You are really amazing... I'm sorry.."

"It's not like that at all! You help out in your store, don't you?" I said to the downhearted Honoka.

"It's not even a big deal. I just sweep in the morning, and when it's busy, I'll help with the box packing. Unlike you, I just tend to the store in my free time...". While the light was shining on my face for a bit, I looked at Honoka, who has no idea what to say. I can't help but smile again.

"We're the same. Isn't it obvious? Being the daughter of a family owned business is really difficult too, isn't it?" I said while smiling. I look ahead and notice that the surroundings suddenly became darker. We started walking toward our houses some time ago. There were barely any people on the street, unlike in the afternoon. The unlit rows of small buildings and houses. The street felt like it went completely silent in the darkness of the night.

If I were to look behind, I could see Akibahara's clusters of shining buildings. We got out of there and crossed a few roads. If we looked at that place from the street we were on, it would look like it floated above the surrounding darkness like a brightly shining island.

From the bank of the barely lit river, if you look ahead, it looks like a dream about an overnight festival. It looks like a scene about this world and Nirvana.

My chest tightens.

The chilly and moist wind blows by and caresses my neck.

"A lot has changed." said the person standing beside me, Honoka, who is also gazing at the shining buildings of Akibahara. "It didn't feel like it's that far from before." Certainly, that scenery is somewhat overbearing. Looks so far from reality, yet at the same time it looks close.

The power from seeing Akibahara's shining buildings beyond the afternoon. Those figures showing themselves off on such a grand scale. You can say it's as if it's transient. It's as if they're trying to convey that power to us, at least it felt that way. We're no match for that current. Even with that being said, it felt like we were waiting for it to raise its white flag.

"I hate it."

I thought of my father in his hakama in the dojo, my mother who has fun drinking tea with her student during training, my grandmother who is holding her headband and her naginata on her hips and the light that strikes the dojo every morning, the sprinklers in front of Honoka's house while I'm on the way to school, and the tofu on the plates being offered by the shrine on the street every morning.

A lot of things came to my mind. It felt like bits and pieces of my heart were being burned. It's not a matter of enemies and allies but I don't like it. The things that change and the things that shouldn't change. It's not like I'm afraid of change. Like I thought, I love this town. This town is precious to me.

An inescapable flow. "I don't want it to be absorbed by that city of shining lights" I thought. I'm not going down without putting up a fight. That's why, if there is something I can do, even if it's just fighting back with 1 small arrow, I will do it. Is it because I practiced martial arts and other traditional stuff ever since I was small?

No, that's not it. This is my instinct, and the feelings from the bottom of my heart. The feelings of me who now has noticed that because of people saying "There's nothing we can do" and not going against it, the things I really don't wish to disappear are gone... the foolish me who hasn't noticed until now. Even though the smiles of the uniform-clad Otonokizaka students are important to me and this town, it's only because of Honoka that I realized that feeling for myself.

Honoka, who was beside me, said in a gentle voice "Now that you said it, I feel the same way"

"Should I have not said that?"

Even though a school idol is the #1 thing I never thought I'd be, I was dancing for dear life before I knew it. Everyone including myself appreciated that embarrassing appearance of the traditional Umi Sonoda.

My face turned red and I hung my head in shame when the image of me in a frilly skirt came up on my mind, I wonder what Honoka thought of that?

Suddenly, Honoka hugged me from behind and said "Thanks a lot Umi-chan! Let's be together forever and ever! I'm going to ask aunty to lessen your training. After all, if she won't do it and because of that you can't find love and get a boyfriend, your family won't have any heir!"

If she says that, Mother will say "Give birth to the third generation of childhood friends together with Honoka." and we'll become the continuation of Mother's old story. As I thought about it, my cheeks felt very hot and got cooled by the night wind as it blows by.

The June night is cooler than I thought it would be. It's probably going to rain tomorrow. We'll have to put our practice sessions into moderation, because we must study for the periodic test. The end of the 1st semester is coming soon.

A single raindrop landed on my cheek. I look up to the sky and.. oh. The rest of the raindrops fall. We have to get home soon. So, as not to waste the important time we have now, starting from tomorrow, let us do our best in studying, everyone.



Comments <3 Honoka

Umi-chan is my super childhood friend even before we were born, since when we were still in our mothers' wombs. She's the person who understands my love for this town the most. I think having a cool girl like Umi-chan is one of Otonoki's good parts. That's why in order to protect Otonoki, µ's will try their best together.

Chapter 2: Exam Season



"To the members who did not reach the average scores in the test before summer vacation, you will receive a 1-hour suspension from club activities!!" Every time the Student Council President Eli Ayase announces it loudly, the groans, screams and shock coming from one part of the club rose up. If I were in Eli's place, being forced to push my authority for the sake of having μ's members avoid getting bad grades, I would totally understand, but even then...

I look at my surroundings with a troubled face. I see Kotori, who also looks troubled while smiling, and the one who thought it was not an unfair decision, Maki and her half stunned expression. In contrast, Honoka, who froze while looking surprised, the flustered Rin, who is making a futile effort by making tapping sounds, Nico, who attempts to make a stealthy escape, Hanayo, who is cowering in distrust and suspicion, and Nozomi, whose gaze feels like it's swimming around somewhere.

This is how the last official training for the test went. There's a reason I put in "official", that's because in Otonoki, there is a time period before the exam made for the sake of studying and preparations. Naturally, we must follow suit. Regarding that, a 2-week suspension to club activities has been established. However, we are a novice idol group that started in April. The event to which no one came to see, the 1st live that held tears, the many small school events that gave us experience, and this is the first time we were tentatively planning to do a big event this summer vacation. If it was going to be like that, this time would be a great time to practice, a time where if we don't start practicing soon, we won't make it.

"Hey, if we do our practice by ourselves without using the school's facilities, maybe our club activities won't be found out?" as soon as Honoka, who was cheerfully suggesting to continue the practice just before, said that, Eli replied with an intense expression "School idols are SCHOOL idols until the very end and studying is one of a student's duties. I cannot allow μ's, Otonokizaka's school idol group representative, become a *"baka idol group"*.

"Eli, you don't have to say it like that, everyone understands. μ's is the much appreciated club that stopped the school from closing. If some of the member's grades weren't so bad, why would we consider this to be a crisis of its survival? " as I said that, I stop Nico from trying to run home. "I knew it" I thought as I make a weary face. Eli turned a blind eye. As if trying to calm us down, Honoka raised her hand "Oh well, If there were failing marks, it would be talked about in the staff room too. Between us members, if it weren't that many of us who got a failing mark, it wouldn't become a matter of having to suspend the club activities like Umi said." Honoka said as she made us huddle.

"Usually, if you get a failing mark, you'll just have to take normal tests and supplementary lessons during summer vacation. Kind of a relief right?..." Eli looked pitiful when she looked at Honoka, Rin and Nicos' faces. "But ever since the announcement that the school will close down went out in April, the teachers had a lot of freetime because luckily, the number of students decreased. This time, the students who get marks below 40 points on the exam will get a failing grade and have to take a focus training program during summer many times larger than the normal school program. That kind of conversation came up and....." as if drowning the rest of Eli's words, this time, it's the genuine sound of all members' screams of shock resonating inside the room.

It can't be.. does that mean the members who will certainly get failing marks can't attend the summer practices? If that happens, μ's summer members will be cut in half.

"If he stood by us, we would succeed" (note: Eli says it in English.)

Following Eli's voice as she reads English literature, Nico raised her hand. "What does it mean by "if he stood by us, we would succeed"? What would we succeed in? Is he actually a net-Idol? Being cheered on by everyone and becoming world-famous on the net. I'm so jealous-nico~!"

What in the world do you mean by that? I want to know.

Ever since I started sitting beside them and being quiet, my head gradually grew painful. This is the dojo when it's a day-off. Eli, Nico and Nozomi gathered here because it's a very spacious place. In the middle of a bunch of seniors, why do I have to be mixed up with them? Of course, Eli was the one who decided against my will. "I can't watch those two on my own. If Umi is there, I think I can manage. Just supervising those two will be enough. Help me out!". She had a strong grasp on my arm as if she's saying "I'm not letting go!" but alas, I was not able to shake free.

Last time, "μ's must score above the average" was declared. After discussing about the countermeasures, we went with studying hard to avoid getting below 40 points. Simple, but there's no shortcut to learning. An easy way would be the best. However, all of the 9 member's weakest subjects are different and we're in different years. We decided to NOT do it together and we split up into 2 teams.

The 5 of them, with the top of the 1st years, Maki and the person whose grades are regularly on the top ten rank, Kotori, are both on the teacher duty taking care of the two girls who have multiple failing marks,



Rin and Honoka who are the main goal of the counter-measures and Hanayo, who is a bit weak at math, are doing a "weakness reinforcement" tutorial.

And so, here is where the 4 of us, with the problematic seniors, gather as Team S. By the way, since we were missing the M from Maki and no matter how many times Maki disagreed to it by saying "The μ in μ 's is not just an M!", this was the name given by Nico. 'Team S' huh. I was a little bothered by it, but if Nico is going to move forward with this much confidence, then it's fine. Maybe it's my fault for taking things too seriously. So, since I was the only underclassman in the strong willed Team S, I was pretty sure I'll just be called to bring some tea or other miscellaneous tasks, but after looking at Nico, my heart throbbed a bit. And so, could it be that I failed by suddenly talking even in this situation?

"Umm, "would" is the past tense of 'will', 'world' is wrong. 'Stand' does not literally mean standing, it meant that he was to become an ally. That being 'If he will be our ally, we would succeed.'"

"I see, 'becoming an ally' huh? Thats right! If we can get a lot of fans on our side, μ 's will become more successful than we are now and become amazing idols!"

"It has nothing to do with fans, this is about the English sentence structure, the past forms and past participles and...."

"Oh, Umi-chan, what are you saying-nico?! Idols should always think about their fans. Even if romance is not allowed, you absolutely must not crush the fans' dreams and idols shouldn't show their panties. The only thing you do is study, did you forget those things?"

"Ehh, umm, you're probably right but we should prioritize studying right now..."

"That's no good, there are a lot of things more important than studying in this world . A person who just studies and trains like you probably won't understand."

I feel weak when you say it like that

"I know! Nico knows a lot about those things! Instead of studying, how about I teach the stiff Umi-chan? Starting from now, have a wonderful time with Nico-nii~"

I'm gradually getting drawn in from looking at Nico's face makes my heart beat harder..

"Stop right there." Eli said as she splits us up.

"Umi, you were completely going at Nico's pace. That's not good, falling for such a basic tactic."

"S-sorry about that."

"You're so mean Eli! I thought it was good. Nico is fine because I'm sure I won't get a failing grade. It's just that I don't like English. After this, you don't have to worry at all! It's not like I'm doing bad in school because I don't like studying. If I do things seriously, I'm sure I would at least pass."



Certainly, her quick-thinking is well-known. Normally, if we took a look at her, even I think she's smart. I don't understand why she has bad grades, it's truly a mystery. I wonder if there's a good reason for that? Eli continues

"However, English isn't the only subject where you didn't pass right? After this, we'll study Classical Japanese literature, even your Modern Japanese grades are on the verge of failing."

"Oh, if it's about Japanese languages, there's a bit of a problem with the teacher not understanding my perspective. After all, I try to guess how the author felt and my answer was not the one the teacher was looking for. When we were reading 'The Spider's Thread' by Ryunosuke Akutagawa, the teacher asked 'Why was Kandata sent to hell twice?' Nico answered 'It's because he didn't know he was live on TV in Paradise, it's better to know the TV schedule even if you don't have to read the whole newspaper. In today's society, you don't know when you're being watched by someone but you shouldn't be too self-conscious. Idols nowadays use twitter and the like.' once I wrote that, that middle-aged grandma of a teacher got mad at me and said 'What in the world is this?!" Eli and Nozomi let out a huge sigh.

"But wasn't I right? Nico was just honestly writing one of the important things in life."

I looked at Nico, who was puffing her cheeks, and let out a sigh without thinking. If it's like this, the teacher really won't understand her perspective.

"But it's ok. Because on this test, Nico will properly put in answers that the teacher will surely love <3. I'll even do it on the practice tests. I don't like lying, but if it's for µ's sake, you can count on Nico <3."

"Really? Even then, after this Japanese History, Classical literature and English are...."
Nico switches Eli's hounding.

"Oh, it's fine, it's fine! It's only because I can't be bothered to memorize things. 'Would' is the past form of 'will', 'stand by' means to make someone an ally... look I already memorized it didn't I? I can understand characters without using the dictionary!"

"Well then, it look like Nozomi is next."

Eli looks at Nozomi's direction with a dubious face, and got confused when she saw Nozomi reading an old book, and hastily hid below her notes. While avoiding Eli's glare, Nozomi said with a bright smile "Oh, me? I'm fine. The only failing mark I got last year was on Science. This year, I'm completely done with my chosen class's Science."

Eli opens her mouth in surprise.

"H-hey, you should have said those things earlier. Well in the end...."

"Team S's countermeasures are already done-nico <3."



Eli launched her pen in shock. Looks like even Eli got rolled into Nico's pace. I would help but I don't have the power.

I thought "If Nico's one true rival, Maki were here, we could win"

In the end, I just made lunch for the three "onee-sama" (just plain fried noodles). Everyone thought it was delicious when we were eating. We went into a room and I taught them how to wear clothes made for special occasions (Nico even took some pictures, she'll probably upload them on the net), I taught them a bit of archery, we went into a room with a kiln and had somewhat rare snacks. Finally, we wore hakamas, held swords and had a sword fight together. Frankly, we just spent the day playing around

Could it be better like this? My expectations that I'll just do errands, that I'll be the sole conscience of the group.... thinking about those makes my chest beat faster. I'll just pray that the darkness will not be present in the blue summer sky.

That would be a victory to us. The journey suddenly becomes more special, like earth to heaven. If this is what people will continue to do, it is because respecting heaven is their purpose. People whose heart can love themselves, will find love using that heart.

I hope we can safely pass this test, and all 9 of us will be able to do the best school idol activities this summer together.

Comments<3 Maki

"Oh, good thing I was in Team M. A study group with the girl from hell, Nico along with Nozomi and her foolish acts huh, impossible, impossible, absolutely impossible for me. I respect Umi for fighting as a one girl army. By the way, thanks to Maki-sensei, Team M honestly got a lot of things done in studying. The roll cake Kotori-chan made was very delicious."

Chapter 3 : My Destiny



"One, two, three, four..."

"Five, six, seven, eight..."

A voice that seemed like it was singing sounds, today's practice had started. This is bad, I'm late..... I thought while dashing from the stairs to the roof. A loud voice that was raised as if it was pointlessly springing up precipitates from above my head. I'm sure it's Honoka's energetic voice.

"Gyaa~, don't stretch like that~! My stomach is, my stomach is...~" my expression relaxed upon hearing that screaming voice.

Everyone is trying hard.

That's why I'll give it my all.

As I got out of the stairwell and through the steel door, I saw everyone energetically stretching. A loud sound crossed over to me. "Oh, it's Umi-chan~!"

While they were in the middle of preparation gymnastics, my eyes met with Rin and the person on her back she is linking her arms with, Honoka. Honoka's large round eyes look like they were always waiting for something. The face of our always energetic leader, Honoka, takes in the sunlight that hits this roof and shines as always. 'Idol group μ's' that's the name we're going with right now as we do our activities.

Even though we are "idols", we are just school idols right now . "Volunteers from the same school form as members and do rank-and-file idol activities" is not too far from what we are doing right now.

Even then, we are doing these activities with utmost effort. Becoming famous idols for this school, our probably unrealistic dream.

Right now, it's for the sake of protecting the school from closing down, the goal we all have in common.

"We already started~. Umi-chan hurry~!"

"Sorry for being late, there were some things I had to do...."

"Stop! Stop! Rin-chan, take it easy will you?"

What cut me off mid-sentence was the cries of Honoka, who went ahead of me and is now being carried on Rin's back. "Raising her voice just because of that. Honoka's body is as stiff as always." I thought as I was giggling and left my things on the corner of the roof.

I should hurry up and get changed.

"one, two, three, four"

"five, six, seven eight"

I can hear their voice behind me as I change in the stairwell, as if I was hiding in its shadows. I slip into the bottom part of my jersey while my skirt is still on. I take off the ribbon on my chest. I unbutton my shirt except for the 2 in the middle. While in the middle of wearing my shirt I make a rummaging sound as I try to unfasten the 2 remaining buttons. I forcefully managed to change my clothes outside. I knew it, I really wished to do this in the club room because I'm just a high school girl.

I sigh while still wearing the weird combination of a skirt and jersey. Once I was done, I sighed in relief thinking it was great that I still made it in time for practice. I made another sigh because changing outside kind of bothered me. I don't know what to feel right now

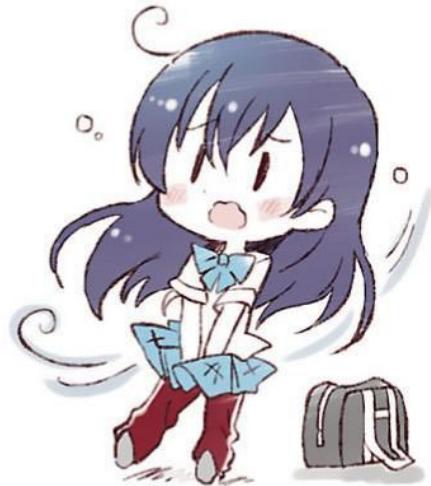
While I was thinking, I looked through the rooftop's wire fence. Wow, a bird's eye view of the school. I can see the archery dojo that I used to go to. I can still remember that scene.

"I'll become an idol!!"

That day in April, the look on Honoka's face as she declared it in the classroom. That figure that got up and stood firm was the childhood friend of mine that I know very well. "I'll do my best in multiplying!", "I will go to the toilet by myself at night!", "I won't cry in the graduation ceremony!" etc., that look on Honoka's face was the same as those times where she declares things with strong resolve.

Even if I thought it was a very wild idea, I was shocked at the same time. That kind of foolish thinking won't get us anywhere, I wanted to throw those feelings to Honoka. But even if I said that, I remembered that it was Honoka that was the one that brought us all the way here. I felt a thump in my chest.

After all, it's Honoka we're talking about here. She was the last one in class to learn multiplication, and she ended up going with her sister, Yukiho for a bit when she went to the toilet at night. However, on our graduation from elementary, and only then, she didn't cry, not even one bit.



The first time Honoka and I met Kotori was on a day where the sky was very clear. On that clear spring day where you can smell the aroma of flowers.

There were a lot of people planning to go on private schools when we go to middle school. The graduation where we may be parted from each other was very lonely and sad, everyone cried a lot. Honoka was the only one who didn't cry.... the one people used to call "Honoka the crybaby".

"I'd like to congratulate everyone today! Honoka is so happy! I hope we'll still be friends forever!" Honoka said with a smile. "My grandma proudly made this," she said as she brought along something to remember this graduation. She held a small box with red and white *manjuus* and shared it with everyone. However, I knew it. That night, while everyone was asleep, I can hear Honoka's voice from her room as she cried her eyes out.

"Uwaa, elementary school is over, I'll never see those guys again, uwaaaaaa!" she says as her cries can be heard outside like a siren. It warmed my heart.



After the graduation, I went to the dojo and received greetings. I went to Honoka's house to deliver the important graduation certificate that I noticed she forgot. That's when I heard that voice.

"I was proud the whole day, wasn't I? If I cry, everyone will be sadder. I don't really want to cry because it's the day I'd like to congratulate everyone. I won't look at our beloved Otonokizaka elementary school with teary eyes, I will burn its image into my eyes with a smile on my face," Honoka once explained to me.

I'm sure it's the same for Honoka now.

Wanting to protect this school with an idol's shining smile, you can see that feeling on Honoka's face.

Because of that night after the graduation, while listening to Honoka's voice below the window of her room, I was sure she and I are going to be friends forever. "Even if everyone else were to abandon Honoka, I'll be by her side until the end," I remember thinking that. "Even if no one else will be by her side, forever shall I be the only ally of this friend of mine who holds a mysterious power of unknown strength," I thought. That's why....

"Umi-chan, let's become idols!"

Absolutely impossible.

In my confusion, that was what I thought when she said it. Eventually, I felt that this is my destiny ever since that time I was captured by Honoka's smile when we first met.

Maybe becoming an idol is my destiny. *giggle*

I stopped thinking about it. It was a rare occasion where I smiled and let my voice out without thinking. Oh Honoka, I'll become an idol? The me who grew up being thoroughly trained in martial arts and Japanese dance, the stalwart me becoming an idol? There wasn't much of a chance. If it wasn't for Honoka, I wouldn't be here thinking about that small chance.

That's why, like I thought.

I'm trying my best in becoming an idol for Honoka's sake. Don't get the wrong idea, Honoka. Until the very end, I'm doing my best as a symbol of our friendship. Why I became an idol is not because I wanted to wear short skirts. It's just that if I try my best like this, I will be able to feel awestruck as I look into Honoka's glimmering eyes as she shines just a little. I'll just write that little secret here.

Letting everyone know about μ's activities, one at a time. Thinking about how our name spreads right now makes me feel happy.

I never thought about what I could have done for this school. Just a single normal powerless second year student. However.....

"U~mi~chan, you took too long changing clothes! We're already doing dance practice, you know?" I gave an energetic reply after hearing that.

My feelings rise as I join in on the practice. We didn't expect what happened next as if that time felt like a dream.

In that time, the members who were already there were us 6. Honoka, Kotori, Rin, Nozomi, Hanayo and I go in. "It's already time! Anyway, how about we start without them?" Kotori starts the music. We start slowly and gradually, and then started dancing seriously. My body feels good as it moves around in the summer heat. I can feel the sweat gather in my eyebrows a bit.

Other than the music, I can hear thumping sounds coming from far down the stairs. What appeared was the first-year Maki with a dark expression that looks like she cried. Honoka's smile quickly changed as she turns to look as if trying to urge Maki to give an answer with her gaze. As she turns her head, she took one long breath.
"Haa~"



What happened? You can see everyone's confusion in the way they move their hands as we dance.

Maki drops her bag beside her and lowered her hips in a rough manner. While sitting like a doll, she throws out her legs. "Oh no, If she sits like that, I-I can see it." I thought. However, The way Maki's sitting is as if she's saying "Oh, don't mind me."

While looking at everyone dancing, her eyes look like they are absent mindedly looking into the distance.

Even then, everyone kept dancing until the end. As the last sound plays, Kotori turns off the music at the same time.

"What's wrong Maki-chan? Do you feel bad?" As Honoka stops, Kotori continues.

"Did you have a heatstroke? In this hot and humid weather, one could easily get dehydrated without noticing that the water they drank is not enough..."

She places her hand on Maki's forehead as she spoke. Maki then stood up and raised her face. While biting her lip, she looked at Honoka and said.

"Today, I'm quitting μ's"

....What?

The words that we didn't expect, the members who were there yelled in unison.

"What did you say just now? 'Quitting μ's there's no way...' Nozomi spreads her hands as if she's saying "it's not possible."

"What in the? Maki-chan, why? Is there something you hate? Something you're not into? Something you're not satisfied with?" Honoka said as she grabbed both of Maki's arms.

"N-no, it's not like that..." As if trying to avoid Honoka's gaze, she looks to the side and covers her eyes.

"Could it be because you can't get the center position? Is that why you want to quit?" Nozomi delivers her line as Maki's gaze tries to avoid her by wandering into the sky.

"Could it be because of someone in your family?" Hanayo says after she moved in front of us, trembling with anxiety.
"I-I can't go on with μ's anymore....."

While Maki cried like a child, everyone looked at her dumbfoundedly while she kept uttering, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry.....".

"And while everyone tried to stop her, she still went home crying like that? is that what you're saying?"
Eli came after she was done with the student council work, and was now done listening to my explanation as to why everyone looked shocked.



Eli sighed and she then let everyone discuss what to do. It got rowdy again with everyone trying to voice their opinions.

"It seems like her father found out about μ's and made her stop. " I say as I stand beside Eli. She then makes a bitter smile.

"What a bothersome princess, the only daughter of the Nishikino Hospital's chairman. There are a lot of medical schools nearby. Along with the hospital rumored to be privately established by her family. It's a mystery why she went into this rustic Otonokizaka academy."

"It looks like that's how her parents, who grew up locally, planned it. Since she was expected to become a doctor, μ's activities would look like something her parents may not have wanted." After I spoke, Eli turned her gaze to me.

"Oh? Is it fine you to say it like that? After all, you're the heiress to the Sonoda dojo. The stage where you practice Japanese dance, the martial arts dojo where you practice kendo, archery and the naginata. If it was true, then your schedule must be packed everyday. You're a sheltered girl who is burdened just as much as Maki is."

We laughed as our eyes met.

"'Sheltered' maybe a bit too much."

"It's not like as if you were sheltered your whole life, it's more like you just came out of your shell"
We laughed for a while

"Umi, do your parents know about μ's?"

"They do, but since they might shun the idea instead of "school idol", they just think it's a dance club. Also it helped that it was Honoka who made me join. They knew Honoka since a long time ago."

"I see."

Even though we had an understanding between each other, it still felt complicated.

"As long as I keep the club's activities in moderation, it's fine because I promised that I will continue training at home."

"So, after today's practice, you'll go home and train?"

"That's how it is everyday. I'm already used to it."

"So that's how it is then. Can you go to Maki and try to reason with her? "

"Even though it's only for the sake of saving Otonoki-"

On the other side, the members are still voicing their opinions.

"Quitting because your parents forbid you is a disqualification from being an idol-nico!"

"No matter how you think about it, hunger strikes won't work-"

"Maki should run away to my house. I'll even give her my bed."



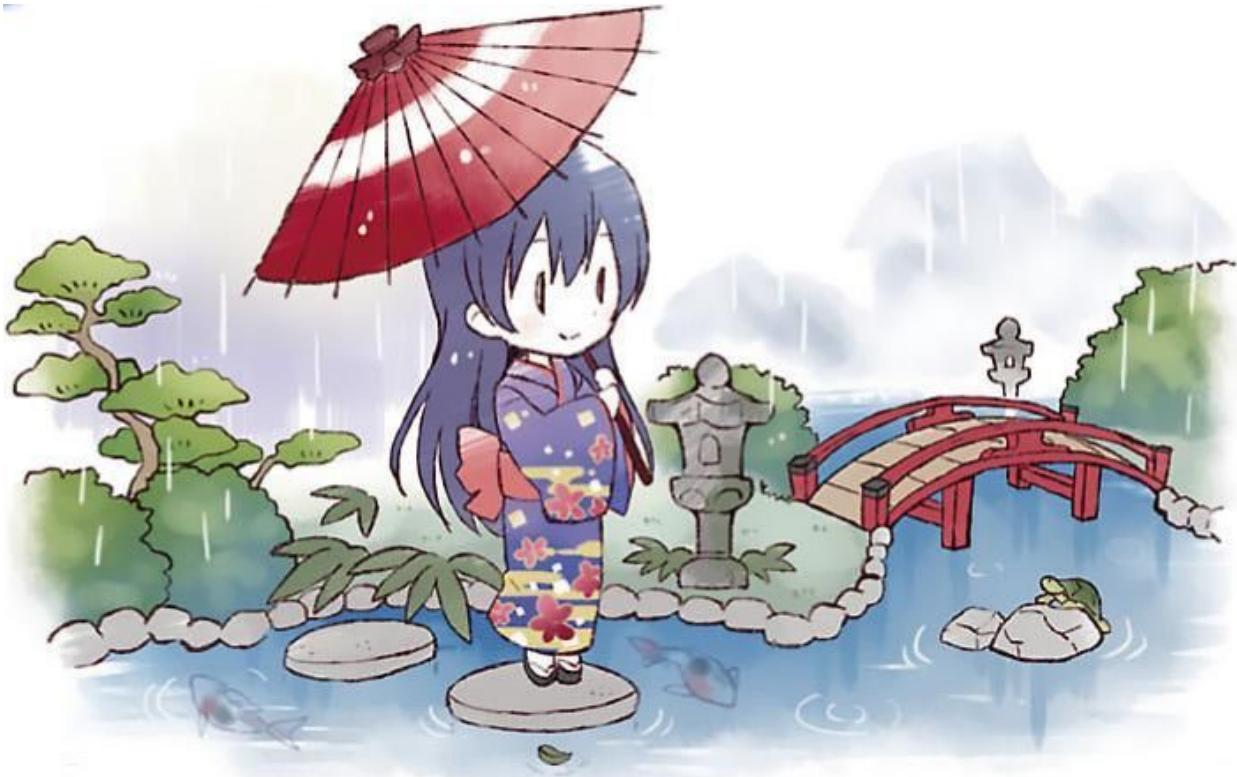
"If you'll do that, they might get angry. Try not to get them mad or they'll really might make Maki transfer schools." Kotori said as she is shaking Honoka by the shoulders.

Honoka then exclaimed "I don't want Maki to be gone! I really don't want it to end up like that!!"

Comments <3 Rin

"If Maki actually runs away to move in with me, I'll seriously give her my bed." I thought. Even though it's not like Maki's princess bed, the fluffy stuffing really makes you rest well. I'll then go to where she's sleeping and sleep with her. Uwaa, I really don't want Maki-chan to be gone. I should ask the clever Umi-chan to tell me what I should do.

Chapter 04: My Destiny Continued



"Yaa! Me~n!"

"Yaa! Kote"

After coming home and eating dinner, as I was practicing my swings in the dojo by myself, my mind was still thinking about Maki.

That strong willed Maki crying like that.

No matter how many times everyone told her not to quit, in the end she said it was pointless, looked away and went home

As her tears flowed, the last thing she kept saying to us was "sorry". Looking at her feeling so low like that, it looked like she was carrying heavy burdens. I heard that story before.

She loved piano more than studying and always thought she will be a pianist when she grows up. Ever since she was little, even she didn't know that her dream changed into becoming a female doctor.

"When I grow up, I'll be a doctor." looking at her parents being openly thrilled, she thought maybe this is the right thing to do.

That's why she can't show anyone the dream hidden her chest. Sealing it inside her heart, going on hoping she may never see it again. Then it became so that even she doesn't know which one is her own actual dream.

I understand it very well.

It's not just because their expectations are heavy.

It's because I respect my father. He thought I was the pride of my family.

It's because I love the people who raised me to be who I am today, they are precious to me.

That's why-

"It would be better if my dreams and my parent's dreams were to be the same." I thought as I became the heiress.

That responsibility felt heavy.

"In the end, I'm serious."

After I finished the last chouyaku swing, I stored the shinai.

The following day, Maki really didn't come to practice.

Maki's not here. The scenery on the rooftop went dull. Everyone lined up and danced, but 1 spot is empty, an empty gap. A hole that cannot be filled. It becomes very visible.

"What should we do? Change the formation?" Eli says while looking a little bothered.

Honoka went silent and looked to the side. In the end, no one went to fill that spot. That's because 1 of us is missing. That spot became a hole that you can't possibly ignore. µ's was a bit broken.

In the middle of the practice, Honoka looked at us with a smile as if she just thought of something.

"That's it! Hey, upbeat songs aren't bad and all, but how about we do a song about Autumn? How about a love song in the form of a ballad? How about we let Maki compose a very heartrending song-" She stopped after saying it. That's right, Maki's not here. Honoka looked hurt.

"I wonder if Maki's studying right now. Poor girl." Rin looks past the rooftop's fence and gazed toward the direction of Maki's house.

"Maki-chan looks like she's not coming back," the person beside me, Kotori, spoke with a voice that sounds like she's about to cry.

I uttered with a low voice "We absolutely can not go on like this."



"We beg of you to please let Maki do the club activities together with us!!" I bow my head as I said those words.

"We absolutely need Maki-chan in μ's!" Honoka, who was beside me, loudly exclaimed. In the Nishikino residence's living room, Maki's father is sitting on the large sofa. As expected, he did not falter upon hearing Honoka's loud voice.

In front of him were the remaining μ's members, the 8 of us lined-up side by side. Everyone stared at the face of Maki's father with their desperate expressions.

"Maki has always been together with us as a friend!"

"If it weren't for Maki, we couldn't have made any original songs."

"I thought Maki is suited to be an idol because she's so cute!"

Everyone used Honoka's voice as a starting signal and started running their mouths went through my mind.

I thought that if I told Eli and Honoka, I'm sure everyone will want to come. We can't have that. With these numbers we'll just cause a scene and it'll backfire. I became anxious and Eli then tried to control everyone.

"I am the third year student council president, Eli Ayase. Currently, I'm working together with them as school idols. If I say it's for the sake of saving the school from closing, it may sound weird to adults but we are serious about this."

"I already heard that story from Maki. What makes Maki so important for your club activities? My little girl will have to move forward with medical school that's why she has to study." Maki's father crossed his arms as he said it.



"That's so mean!"

"Maki was crying since she wanted to go with us so badly."

"Shhh... be quiet--"

Eli stops Nico and Rin.

"I understand your opinion on this but, Maki's grades are excellent even now. While she gives that much effort in studying, she stood up in order to stop Otonokizaka Academy from closing. Can you understand and respect her feelings somehow?"

Honoka stood up

"I umm am the ringleader who invited Maki-chan. Maki-chan was always playing the piano in the music room. Alone with that beautiful piano. I was moved and thought this person made beautiful music. When I went to talk to her she was a good kid and she was so cute. I uhh kept thinking that I want Maki chan to join us-"
her voice is shaking

"It's all my fault. I selfishly made Maki join, I selfishly made her make some music, I... It's not Maki's fault. That's why... That's why, please don't stop Maki-chan from doing the things that she loves. Maki-chan really wants to be in μ's no matter what you do. We faced lot of hardships, even though no one came to watch our performance at first everyone tried hard and got this far. She's a friend we don't want to lose. Please, give her back to us."

"Why is it so noisy down here?"

On that moment, Maki got out of her room and came down to the living room.
"You guys... why?"

As she saw the scene where in front of her father, were the 8 of us kneeling, I said to Maki as she was at a loss for words.

"Maki, do you still want to be with μ's?"

Large drops of tears flow on her face.

"I am Umi Sonoda, the girl from the Sonoda Dojo."

"Ahh.."

Maki's father seems to know about my family.

"I was raised to be the heiress to the dojo. Even now, I train everyday with that intention in mind. Everyday I feel lost, thinking if it is fine like this. If moving forward in my path for this purpose in mind is truly right."

I can feel his strong gaze.

"It's not like I'm dissatisfied with my parents. It's not like I want to go against the life I was born with. Other than that, I, along with these people, love the town that I was born and grew up in. I love the people I met in this small town. I grew up happy even until now. I really want to protect this town. That's why I work as a school idol in order to protect Otonokizaka like this." Honoka, Kotori, Hanayo, everyone nods in understanding.

"I'm sure Maki feels the same, even though she has a hard time expressing herself. Inside me, it's all connected. The dream where I'll be the successor of the dojo is not mistaken. I will surely follow that dream. The dream to protect my beloved town, and being idols together with the precious friends I met here. It's also the same about that dream. The precious things that are packed up inside of me are all in this town. That's why I'm trying my best. Right now, I still can't decide on one of those. That's why-"



I bow my head one more time.

"Please give us some time. We can't go on if one of us is missing. Everyone is important. Because of μ's we realized that we want to protect the school filled with the things that we love. Even though we are scattered in terms of personalities, everyone's feelings are the same. We want to move the hearts of the people in order to protect the things we love. That is all. We decided that won't give up again."

A teardrop fell on the back of my hand.

That's weird.

It's like my mind became clearer when I said those words. It's like the hazy that I had cleared up.

Maki speaks out as if she can't hold it any more. "Father, please! I absolutely want to be in μ's . I beg of you. I'll study hard. I'll surely be accepted in medical school. I'll do whatever you say. So please let me stay in μ's. I... I won't give up."

Everyone then begged by saying please at the same time. The serious look on everyone's faces were being conveyed.

Thanks to everyone, Maki's sentence was suspended. She smiles while being a bit embarrassed.

While we were changing clothes, Maki whispered to me.

"Umi-chan, I never knew you were also having a problem being a heiress."

"I don't like talking about it much."

"What is your real dream then, Umi-chan?"

"It's-"

Honoka and Kotori's face popped up on my mind. At the same time, I thought about everyone singing and dancing with their cute costumes-

"Y-you're mistaken! That's not my dream or anything!"

I swing my arms in surprise. Maki makes a slightly puzzled face.

"What am I mistaken about?" As she said it, the strong summer winds blows by.

"Gyaaa~!"

Our things got blown away and causing quite a ruckus. While still in my T-shirt, I run to try and pin down our things.



The things I do for my school. I think it would have been better if we did this in the club room.

"It's all thanks to you Umi-chan that I returned. Papa looks like he's taken a liking to you. You were really cool. It looks like we can start going out without any problems <3."

"W-what are you saying, Maki?"

As Maki fools around, on the other side is a big summer cloud blocking the light.
As I look up I thought "We should get back to the club room soon, or we'll get charred from spending too much time under the sun.". It was a normal June afternoon.

Comments <3 Kotori

Umi-chan was really, really cool when she tried to convince Maki's dad. That bravery made her look like Oscar-sama from Takarazuka. I really can't copy the way Maki's father spoke. She was so dreamy at that time. I'm so happy being Umi-chan's childhood friend. I'll make an Oscar-sama outfit for Umi-chan, I hope she wears it and shows it to me.

Chapter 05: μ 's Summertime

In the end, the results of the tests were

Nozomi= no supplementary tests

Nico= 1 supplementary test -> Safely passed

Rin= no supplementary test

Hanayo= no supplementary test

Honoka= 3 supplementary tests -> 1 remaining

.....

Honoka's remaining test will be held on the last day of the semester, on the afternoon after the closing ceremony. If she fails, all our plans for this summer will be for nothing. We were on the edge about this. We, the remaining members, met up on the rooftop and waited for Honoka as we paused our practice. We can't calm down.

"Hey, Honoka is taking the test on the room below us right now, isn't she? If she has a hard time with a certain word or has trouble with a question, I'll secretly give her a sign. I'm sure she'll pass with flying colours."

"If you do it like that, you'll fall!"

"Umi-chan, if you're just going to be like that then it's Honoka's grades that will fall. Even then, Honoka has very bad luck. It was a good thing I didn't have any supplementary tests, I don't know what I'll do if I had to take a test 4 times."

It's not a matter whether she's lucky or not.

"It's going to be okay. It's Honoka-chan we're talking about here. I believe that she'll be fine."

Hanayo then makes a calm and kind face.

Oh Honoka, bringing everyone together like this.

Since you're making such a resolved face, I decided not to tell anyone about the commotion yesterday when you got an "X" mark.

I hope you can go through this safely. A μ 's without you feels like we're lacking a part. Like we're missing an color.

Summer vacation now begins on the first weekend. We came to the sea.

"It's the sea! It's the sea! It's the sea~!" Honoka shouts as she looks to her side and dashes toward the beach



"She's the person who tried her hardest for this day, isn't she?" the person who stood beside me, Eli says as she smiles. Following Honoka are Rin, Hanayo and Nico who couldn't resist and ran to the beach. After that, Kotori, Nozomi and Maki followed while bringing the parasols and the bags.

"Honoka loves the sea ever since we were little. Naturally, when I was a child I thought she was calling me." I giggled a little.

"How about you, Umi? Even though it's in your name, don't you like the sea?" Eli teases. I replied without thinking-

"Names are things that we receive. I don't hate the sea or anything. I-it's not that special to me a-and..." Eli grabs my hand and pulls me after I looked down in embarrassment.

"Oh Umi, you're too cute <3. How about we go together? If we run around this sandy beach, we'll feel younger and be merry like Honoka. Everyone tried their best in the exams, so this trip will be our reward. The mature Umi should have fun!" She suddenly starts running after she says it.

"Aah, Please w-wait a minute!"

I'm no match for her strong pull. Ever since I was a child, there was a lot of people who were the type to get powered up and suddenly run around.

The sands that have been dried up by the summer sun scorch the soles of my feet. In order to avoid that heat, I picked up my pace and ran faster together with Eli under the shining summer sky.

The scorching sands.

The sparkling waves of water rising up.

The waves strike the shore and wash my feet with the cold seawater.

I feel a strong beat on my chest.

"So this is the sea."

"You came!" Eli then suddenly smiles as our eyes meet. I started to laugh loudly without thinking.

This is amazing, this liberating feeling. Its power, making people smile by just looking at it. It resembles the smile Honoka makes.

I started looking for them and found Honoka and the others excitedly swimming toward the open sea while holding the floating tubes. As I see their figures I said

"Honoka and the sea really suit each other. The sea and I don't really fit that well."

"Oh Umi, you look amazing in the sea." my face went red after hearing Eli say it.



"I-I'm not the bright and cheerful type."

"Honoka really looks good on the afternoon sea. But, the afternoon sea is not the only thing that's there. For Umi however,... that's a secret <3. Other than that, everyone of us is a school idol so it's natural for us to look good in a swimsuit while at the beach or the sea." Eli then pulls out a straw hat.

"Since you're the Yamato Nadeshiko, don't hang under the sun too much okay?" now that you mention it, I forgot my hat today.

I can't say anything as my face gets gazed at by Eli's adult-like look.

Even though I'm the eldest child in the dojo.

"H-How about we go swimming?" I tried not to look at her face while I said it.

"Sure, how about we see which one of us gets to that buoy the quickest?"

I have an older sister that went away to get married. Hmm... by any chance, Eli might be a good girlfriend. Eli and I, huh... there's only a year between us. Even now, why do I always feel like silently surrendering to her? If I don't think about it I may not be able to find an explanation as to why.

After that, we played to our heart's content until we were completely exhausted. We played volleyball with the ball Rin brought. Kotori carried a huge box, but instead of our costumes, a large watermelon was inside. Kotori's mother then split the watermelon.

We ate shaved ice by the beach house, Strawberry Red, Lemon Yellow and Blue Hawaii. Various colours painted our tongues. We dug a hole and buried Nico in the trap. It looked like Nico doesn't come to the beach often since she was diligently looking for seashells even though the tide wasn't low *giggle*

Though it wasn't what you call "standard procedure", it was a fun summer day. As the sun gradually sets, the people scatter like clams in the tide.

Soon, the little children were gone. I didn't want to believe that this fun day would end. The images of the afternoon frolicking by the sea disappears like a mirage. Soon, the sky starts to shine in an orange glow.

Kotori says "This looks like the end, isn't it?"

"Having fun like this was great." Rin replies

"It would be nice if we could come again" Hanayo continues

Maki makes a displeased face and says "We're going back to practice every day aren't we?"



"We're school idols after all! We have to be glad that we are thriving in this business." Eli then hits Nozomi's shoulders.

"We just took a breather today. Did everyone have fun?"

"Today was a reward for us with the success of the Summer Live. Starting tomorrow, we should get serious okay?" Nico energetically exclaims.

Looking at that, Honoka smiles. "How about we dance right here for a bit?" I look around and see that there's nobody else around on this wide beach. The orange light shines on the surface of the sea and gets reflected.

"It really looks like a PV scene." I said without thinking. Upon hearing my words, Nico jumps and says

"Wow Umi-chan, you're starting to think like an idol! You're so smart ~nico"

Kotori starts the music with the small speakers she brought.

It was now past 6PM

Well since no one was around, this is fine isn't it?

We went with the flow of the music, the long awaited new song that we practiced for.

We danced on the sand in our swimsuits.

On the other side from the sea, the sun sets. Suddenly, a cool wind blows. The darkness grows in the blue sea. It looks so different in the afternoon. I calm down as I stare into the sea. It feels like it's cleansing me from everything that has happened in this day.

As I return the hat to Eli, she says "The afternoon sea under the scorching hot sun suits Honoka. But, Umi really looks good in the calm, evening sea." I think coming to the beach is nice from time to time. If the summer's lives go well, we wish to return to this sea, President Eli.



Comments <3 Nozomi

If the summer's lives go well, this time it would be better if we take a small trip to Enoshima, visit Sarasvati-sama and making our luck on stage grow. Umi-chan keeps comparing herself to Honoka and I'm sure she won't lose. She'll then try to make her breasts bigger like mine. Drinking milk is the way to go~.

Chapter 06: The Right Person in the Right Place

I tighten the cord of my hakama once more, put on my black chest plate and as I open the door, I hear the "whoosh" sounds coming from arrows being fired.

Their voices rise as they hit the middle of the target.
This tense feeling brings back memories from way back

On the final weekends of July, I went to Chiyoda district's sports institute to participate in the Archery competition. I didn't want them to misunderstand so I wrote it clearly because I quit the Archery club. But my juniors were relying on me to help them just this once.

"Next, We have the Otonokizaka archery club. Please line up."
A 5 man team.
I go to the last archery ground and spread my feet apart.

What's important in Archery is gracefully pulling the bow and hitting the target. It's not really something specific, just hitting the target gracefully.

I exhale thinking "Calming down my breathing and concentrating is important."
The surroundings quiet down. The world is silent.
It's like being in a world where time stopped.

Slowly, I raise my bow.

From where I'm shooting, nothing else exist except for what was in front of me. Just the black and white target standing tall. My mind goes blank and my body faces the target. I pull the bowstring, taking my time.
"whoosh"

I release my fingers and the arrow flies at full speed. I feel a bit of energy leaving my body and at the same time applause starts to well up.

"All four targets hit"

I forgot about this feeling long ago. it feels like I just removed something that was building up inside me. Suddenly being so happy, I don't know why my cheeks are going red. I lowered my head a bit and said my thanks as I went to the back of the range.

"You hit all the marks! As expected from Sonoda-senpai."Thanks for today. We set our gaze at the greenery of the lawn as we sat at the edge of the dojo. My junior lowered her head as she sat beside me.

"I just pulled out of the club all of a sudden and caused trouble for everyone, this is the least I could do." I winked. She then steps back as if she's shaking. She didn't have to make a reaction that big. Looks like I have a long way to go in imitating Eli.



"The atmosphere around you changed somewhere. It's been so lonely. Are you really not coming back to the archery club? You're so strong, it's a waste..." It's kind of bothering me that she looks at me like that as if she's clinging to me.

"It's because everyone tried their best"

"That's not true! The reason we won is mostly because senpai was there. Everyone can shoot with their hearts at ease. Aren't you the strongest archer in Otonoki Archery Club's history, the undefeated Ace? During the competition in the summer, I heard different schools spreading rumors. In addition, they thought we brought the wrong group. Everyone went to see Sonoda-senpai. 'Why is Sonoda from Otonoki not here?', 'If Otonoki's Sonoda isn't here they might as well not hit any marks.' It was so frustrating for me. " Tears started to form from her eyes.

"I'm sorry..."

"Sonoda-senpai, please return to the archery club. Being the daughter of a family known for their skill in archery and not joining the archery club is unheard of." I hand her back the drink. I have afternoon practice after this.

"I apologize for being late. I just got back." I say after running up the stairs and opening the door.

"What's wrong Umicchi? Being so respectful makes you look so cute!" Nico comes to my side and caresses my cheek.

"A-aaahh"

That's right. This is the μ's practice, not the Archery club. It looks like helping those guys out brought me back to my old self.

"Welcome back! How was the competition?" Maki and the person she's talking to, Honoka turn look at me.

"I did my job at least." as I say those words Kotori smiles and says

"Wow! Even though you haven't participated in a long time, you won easily!"

"It was just a small district competition."

"Even if you say that, you still won. Umi sure is the Undefeated Queen of Archery-nya!"

Honoka then smiled.

"Umi-chan, I know you're tired but since we're all here together. Let's start practicing the steps of the new song for the Summer Live Shows!"



Roger that!

That said, I feel great practicing for the live shows coming this summer.

There weren't that many clubs coming to do their activities. The nearby competition looks like a little league baseball match.

The song playing is "1,2 Jump with a Summer coloured Smile!" It's the new song we made just for the summer live shows. A fantasy-like, fast rhythm that is different from what we usually do. Very cheerful with a pleasant feeling, a very summer-like song. I continue dancing while feeling good because of the victory from earlier. Huh?

What?

W-wait. Sorry.

This is a bit difficult.

I'm trying to get back to my senses. I'm trying to catch up. I'm getting off-rhythm.

Umm.. Raise my hands here, Exchange glances, One, Two, umm...

Ah, I raised the wrong hand!? ah, I won't make it. W-what should I do?

"Stop! Stop the music." Nico raises her hand and Kotori then stops the music.

"What's wrong, Umi-chan? Did you forget the choreography?" She places her finger on her lips.

"I'm sorry, It's not like that. I'm just slipping off the tempo."

Ahh.. I am lying down and taking a rest. "Umi-chan, You were just in a Archery competition this morning. I'm sure you're tired." Kotori says as she caresses my head. I close my eyes

"It's probably because she's been practicing Japanese dance for so long that her rhythm is behind. Even though she's talented, she's a bit slow. Her center of gravity is a bit low-"

My rhythm is behind?

My center of gravity is off because of the Japanese dances?

I can't really hear what Maki is saying because I'm getting dizzy.

"Umm..." I said as I raise my head and see the worried faces of Honoka and kotori

"Are you okay, Umi-chan? I think it's better for you to relax." I tried to refuse but-

Thinking I got a heatstroke for being under the shining summer sun, Kotori forced me to rest. I knew I should have rehydrated.

Under the shade near the stairwell, I looked at them continuing where we left off as I drink the Pocari sweat from the cooler box. Even with an empty spot where I was supposed to be, their dancing is great.



With a damp towel on my head, I grow sleepy as I watched them.

I remembered what Maki said earlier.
Slow rhythm, low center of gravity-
To be honest, those words hurt.
Those being said, it really struck me.

Ever since I was small I kept listening to the beats of Kiyomoto and Nagauta as I trained in Japanese dance. My center of gravity is low because of how I completely disciplined myself for martial arts. It's something that's been driven into me long ago, the absolute fundamentals of discipline and the rhythm of my home.

I'm not that talented in music unlike Maki so I can't explain it. Even then I understand it well. This upbeat, high-energy summer song is different. It's too different.

I sigh in despair.

This might be the first time in my life.
There's something I can't do.
It's ingrained in me.
Everything I try is in vain.

I remembered the fast rhythm. Now that I think about it, I felt out of place at that time. Maybe I'm just not used to it yet. It's because I used to not have any interest in idol songs.

The Summer live is so close and here I am unable to keep up.

Is it fine like this? No, this is not good at all.

Honestly, what should I do? I'm starting to miss it a little bit.

My four arrows hitting the mark, the shouts of joy at the dojo and my junior's compliments. I remember the victory on the District Competition. My heart beating happily. That time, that place. Contributing to the team's victory. But now...

Should I really be here? I compare myself to the other 8 members. I'm the odd one out. Could it really be that the place that I belong to isn't here? But...

I spent my time walking down Akihabara. I refused Honoka and Rin's request to go eat crepes. I said there are some things I'd like to think about. Before I realized it, my feet led me to the opposite direction from my home, to the alleyways, to the chaotic shopping district of Akihabara.

"What should I do?" I whispered.
Really, what should I do?



Why did I come here? I don't know.
I look up and I see a huge sign.

Idol.... Shop?
What kind of store is this?
I have no idea.



Usually I would just turn back. However, I want something right now .. something to get a good grasp on. Just a little hint. As I prepared myself to climb 1 floor in the multi-tenant building...

"Oh, Umi-chan!"

"Oh, refusing crepes and dashing to this kind of place is unfair, Umi-chan!" Suddenly, Nico's body comes flying to me. In my confusion, she starts grinding her body against mine.

"Its rare seeing you here. Are you shopping?" Kotori's smiled. She seems to be holding a huge bag with the shop's logo on it.

"N-no, I was just..." I impulsively reacted. Why did I do that? I was just genuinely curious of this store.

"So you came to research about idols? Good choice, Umi-chan! This place is filled with idol goods as the name suggested. Nico-nii also came here to check it out. Kotori came to get some references in making costumes. This store gives great guidelines. That's right, come look! It's so interesting!"

Nico looked into my face, Nico's face when she smiles is an amazing sight.

We climb the dark stairway. The echoes of the chaos inside the small store can be heard from the heavens. The path is barely wide enough for one person to pass. The products placed weren't just Idol Group CDs and DVDs, there were magazines, books, cards, mascots, straps and all other accessories.

Or so I thought.

From bath towels to stage costumes (I wonder if they're the real thing) were lined up. A body pillow with a person's picture printed on it. Woah, is this full-sized?

"Oh, Umi-chan! The hug pillows caught your eye, eh? You're unexpectedly mature. These pillows were made for boys to sleep while hugging it like this. Look! You can kiss it like this." While Nico "performed", Kotori goes "kyaa!". Meanwhile, I grew dizzy, it felt like the world turned 180 degrees all of a sudden. It's like I went into another world.



"I thought Idols only sold CDs" I said

"If they're gonna hold themselves back like that, they won't survive in the rough world of entertainment. That's why you should stop being so modest, Umi-chan. Go wild like the idols these days. If you keep being yourself, I'm gonna take your fans- " and in that moment...

"I-It's A-RISE!"

Those were the voices of lovely young girls. On the other side of the shelf, there were 2 girls wearing uniforms I don't recognize. Are they middle school students? They were looking at this kind of store with admiration as if they are very familiar with it. Those girls' eyes are shining as they stood in front A-RISE goods corner. A-RISE is the school idol group that represents the UTX Academy that is found on Akibahara along with Otonokizaka.

"Oh no! Hide!"

Nico makes us kneel down by pushing down our heads. Why? After hearing the signal, Nico whispers to my ears.

"We are school idols right? If we were found by fans, it could spell trouble." Yeah, I'm sure these girls are A-RISE's fans but I feel like that doesn't matter. We don't even have a single product yet. I can't help but make a bitter smile. I'm getting interested. We decided to peek through the gaps of the shelves. As they try to contain their excitement, they evaluated the goods here and there. They said things like "This Anju-chan strap is the best" and "I really want Kira-sama's nail set but its so expensive, I can't buy it this month". Those two are having fun talking about this with each other. Looking at cards, whispering who knows what about that handwritten sign on the corner, giggling and embracing each other.

Those eyes were sparkling. Like being in a dream, their eyes were shining.

"Even young girls shop here, it seems."

"Well, obviously! Idols are popular for boys and girls alike. For Elementary students they prefer School Idols over Boy Groups. Groups that aren't popular to girls will never catch a break." Nico energetically shows her view.

The brightness on their faces are different from what Honoka, Nico, Kotori... no, from what the μ's members have. It conveys a brilliant form of heart throbbing happiness. That's probably admiration to the person they love. I feel like I can understand.

A pure, wholehearted admiration, something one cannot take control of.

So painfully bright and dear, admiring a bright existence that they think they can never become, even if that person is of the same gender. Even though that felt like it's not relevant, Its clearly just someone thinking about the other person with only pure thoughts. In my case, that someone is very close to me, sometimes these feelings make me fall into various chaotic situations.

Looking at them made my heart throb. It's weird, it's kind of contagious, isn't it?

As I try to hold down my intense heartbeats

"Wow! Umi-chan that looks good on you!" Kotori was doing things at her own pace and was looking at the products on the shelf. It feels like she put something on my head. Hmm...

"It's really cute! I should include this in Umi's next costume." Kotori then holds a mirror to my face.

Looking at my reflection, I see a headband placed on my head and on it are a pair of fluffy, white cat ears.

"....!!!"

I thought my heart was going to jump out of my mouth. The noise I made echoed but words won't come out. My body went stiff, I couldn't take it off right away.

"That looks good on you. Are you going to buy it?"

As Kotori continued talking, my eyes were fixated on the reflection on the mirror. My heart beating fast only because of what I just saw before, isn't it? There's no way this suits me. I wanted to calm down and say that. My words fail to come out and my body is not moving. I can only continue staring at myself in the mirror. Why does the inside of my chest feel a bit itchy?

The things Kotori said. Could it be that my reflection is becoming more adorable? or is it just my imagination? These white, fluffy cat ears. I look like a different person wearing them. Totally different from the strict martial artist Umi, the completely girly version of me. My body suddenly feels lighter. What should I do? Doing things like this... Ever since I was a child, I only wore plain dark colored clothing. Deep inside I am asking myself "Is it really fine if I wear this?".

"Umi do you have 880 yen?" Kotori asked. I just silently nodded.

"That's nice. I wanted to wear cat ears too~. The past is past and all but in the end, Umi-chan has the cutest costume now. Kotori-chan you keep spoiling Umi. It's unfair if you play favorites."

As Nico whined, Kotori was looking at me with a gentle smile on her face. "I always thought you were suited to be an idol. Being so amazing, cool and gallant and yet you're so cute. There's no one else in the world like you, Umi-chan. I love you~! I hope you look forward to the costume I'm making!" The feeling of Kotori hugging me. So soft and warm. I already lost in girliness. I can't help but smile.

As I left the store. I hold the paper bag with the cat ears to my chest. I stop for a bit. Being an idol is not about the center of gravity or rhythm, is it?



The weight of having to get rid of the center of gravity that resulted from daily Japanese dance and martial arts training.

It feels like that phantom weight has been lifted from my heart. My body feels lighter. It feels like I can dance comfortably tomorrow. Because of the insistent Kotori, I feel like an oath has been written.

If I were to write an oath. Hm.. My heart would beat fast, I'd feel embarrassed but it looks so fun. I want to run away. I feel like I'm about to cry. The cat ears that gave me courage, I feel like maybe wearing these comfortably was just a thing of the past.

WRITTEN OATH

“ I PROMISE TO WEAR THE CAT EARS TOGETHER WITH THE NEXT COSTUME. I ALSO PROMISE TO NOT HATE IT AND RUN AWAY.”

-Sonoda, Umi



Comments: Kotori

"Kyaa! I witnessed it! Umi-chan being awakened by the cat ears! Awesome, awesome! Cat ears are great! They're just standard costumes but their destructive powers are outstanding. I'd be happy if I were in Umi's shoes. Fluffy white cat ears and a blushing Umi. I'm so happy! I'm going to work overnight to make the costumes!"

Chapter 07: Two Childhood Friends

That night, I opened my door to find that I had a visitor. Namely, Honoka.

“What could you be doing at this late hour?” I ask, surprised.

“I ran away from home!” Honoka responds with her face puffed and her eyes upturned. Then, acting as if it were perfectly natural, she takes off her shoes and steps inside my house, carrying her luggage with her.

“Oh, Honoka? Are you staying the night?” Honoka answers my mom with a nod, “Yeah, if you’ll pardon my intrusion! I wanted Umi to help me with some homework!”

As she puts on a smile and giggles nervously, I see a hint of red in her eyes. *Oh, she’s done it again*, I think to myself.

I believe it’s been some time since she last did this.

I check the standing clock by the doorway, and it reads 8 PM.

“How much homework do you expect to get done this late in the day?” I whisper to myself.

Fshhhhh.

The sound of water running through to the bathroom shower echoes through the pipes. In the meantime, I make a call to the Kousaka house.

“Yes, she did. She just arrived... I’m afraid so... She will be staying the night with us.”

As I bow my head in the direction of the phone mounted in the empty hallway, I hear a bright voice, much like Honoka’s, but deeper and huskier, through the receiver.

“Good grief, I’d expected as much from her. That girl’s seriously a one-trick pony. But I’m sure her father would be a little shocked if she really ran away and nobody knew where she’d gone, a hah hah.”



That would be Honoka's mother, whom I know quite well. A lively, unreserved, and refreshing woman, and a hard-working, wonderful mother. My own mother, on the other hand, seemed sheltered and demanding, and strictly enforced proper speech and conduct, so I used to admire Honoka's mother.

I remember wishing many times that I could be sisters with Honoka and Yukihiko, and eat *manjuu* every day. My older sister is far older than me, and had long since left the house, so perhaps I felt lonely, being essentially an only child. My daily training was also exhausting, as well.

"Umi, I'm done showering! Thanks for lending me your pajamas! Ah, I feel so refreshed!"

Honoka has stepped out of the bathroom. I quickly throw the phone back on the hook.

"Will you be sleeping in my bed tonight?"



"Yep! Traditional-style futons are nice, but snuggling up together in a sofa bed is fun too, don't you think!?"

As I thought, it seems she never had a mind to do any homework in the first place. I smile reluctantly. My orange, checkered pajamas look far better on Honoka than they do on myself.

♡♡♡♡♡

"Ready to turn off the lights?"

"Yep?"

With the room darkened, I lie down next to Honoka, facing the ceiling.

"Aren't you going to ask me why I ran away?" Honoka whispers.

It's always been like this. Whenever Honoka's on a sleepover, she'll start talking as soon as the lights are off, as if a switch flips inside her head.

"Well then... why?"

I'd actually already heard the reason from her mother, but Honoka seems unusually eager to talk about it, so ask anyway. And, as if waiting for this moment...

"It's my dad! I'm so sick of him! At first he wasn't against μ's at all, just like, 'You'll never get some fancy job like being an idol anyway, so do whatever you like as long as you don't slack off in the store!' but now he's a total grouch!" Honoka fidgets nervously in the darkness.

"I've been helping out in the store as much as I can, and for schoolwork, I've got you and Kotori and the rest of μ's helping me out, so I think that's pretty good compared to how I usually am. Of course, since I'm practicing with μ's every day, I'm a lot busier, and I don't have my life together like you do, so sometimes I'm too late to help close up shop, and when there's morning practice, I can't help clean then either, but I didn't think it really mattered since Yukiho covers for me. When I talked about μ's before, he'd smile and tell me to go on, but now he just makes these scary faces and it keeps getting worse every day..."

Honoka's voice in the darkness starts sounding somewhat timid.

"He was like, 'It's always μ's this, μ's that! Well if μ's is that important to you, then you can quit and we'll make Yukiho inherit the shop instead!' Why's it gotta be one or the other? I've been doing my best with μ's to save Otonoki, but that's because I love our town and I love the Homura, so it's really all the same..." I hear Honoka sniffling and crying a little. Somehow, I think I can sympathize a little with Honoka's father.

He must be feeling lonely. Honoka used to be a bright and cheerful, if childish, girl, one who always put her family first. But now that she's started μ's, she has started to change. She has found something more precious and enchanting to her than anything else.

And, like a romance, μ's has caused Honoka to grow. Even as someone who has known Honoka for so long, I can tell that she's changing. More so because I've been changing as well. For better or for worse, my parents aren't the type to speak their minds so directly in times like these, so I've avoided meeting a fate similar to Honoka's for the time being.

Honoka, your father must be feeling jealous

I know that he's lonely because μ's has taken his lovely little daughter away from him. That's what I want to say, but...

"Maybe I need to back off from the μ's stuff a bit..."

I can't bring myself to say it.

All of a sudden, I find myself talking about something entirely different.

"Honoka, do you remember? You used to run away from home all the time when we were little." Is it because I was unsure whether I could properly sympathize with her, or because I felt the same way her father did?

"Huh? Did I really?"

"Yes, you did. Back then, whenever you fought with Yukihiko, your parents would tell you to be more mature, and then you would charge out and over to my house."

"Oh, yeah! Man, I owe you bigtime for all those sleepovers!"

"Do you remember the time we ran away to the Kanda Myoujin shrine, back in third grade?"

"Wha, the Kanda Myoujin? Kanda Myoujin... Kanda Myoujin... hmm... oh, yeah!"

~~~~~

On that night, we snuck away from home and into the Kanda Myoujin shrine. Thinking back on it now, it was only shortly before our bedtimes, so it was probably only a little before 8 PM. It was hardly late night, but back then, we almost never went outside after school let out at 5, so it looked to be rather late at night to us. The Kanda Myoujin, which was so lively and crowded in the daytime, was now covered in a mysterious aura of darkness and silence.

And the reason we were running away... is something I no longer remember.

Honoka and Yukihiko must have been stealing each other's food, or Honoka hid a test she got a 30 on, or another one of the usual reasons. After running away several times, Honoka realized that her parents would know she was at my house. So, of all the things she could have done, she decided to camp out.

"Hey, Umi, you think it's true that ghosts show up at the Kanda Myoujin at night?"

"No, Honoka, don't say that! I'm already scared enough the people at the shrine will get mad at us!"

Sitting down, the wooden donations box was enough to entirely hide our small bodies from view. The inner shrine was strangely calming, and less scary than I'd expected, but I was more nervous that an adult might find us and get mad.

If anyone knew we were outside now, they would yell at us. And, if they found out we ran away from home, they might call the police and have us arrested. When my shoulders started shaking at the thought, Honoka hugged me tightly.

"Are you scared, Umi? It's okay, everything's fine. I'll get rid of any ghosts that show up. I'm a total dodgeball pro, right? If there's a ghost, I'll just smack it on the head with a ball and make him go away!" Hm? I responded with the first thing that came to mind.

"But you can't touch ghosts, can you? Even if you throw a ball at it, won't it just pass through? And we don't even have any balls here."

Then, Honoka said, "Oh, I know, I'll just whack it with my bag! It's got some chocolate cookies in there, but we can still eat them even if they get crushed a little! Pretty clever, right?"

*You didn't listen to the first half of that, did you?* I thought.

*Rustle rustle*

A hint of movement flashed in a nearby thicket.

"Kya, kyaaaaa! It's a ghoooost!"

Honoka screamed and ran away too fast for me to realize what was happening. I stood and stared at her dumbfounded for a moment before returning to my senses.

"Honoka, come back! I don't think that was a ghost, it must have been some..."

As I call out and chase after her, lights come on inside the shrine. Oh no, someone heard us!

I falter and checked around me before returning to my desperate pursuit of Honoka.

We can make our getaway now, get home, and everyone else will be none the wiser. That was my plan.

I was more scared of being caught by an adult than a ghost.



Worries swirled in my young mind that if they found me, they could arrest me and lock me in prison. Then, I wouldn't be able to go home or eat anything for several years, and they'd force me to work for them. I ran for my life, but I was easily caught.

"There's a kid! What's a kid doing here!? Was there a kidnapping!? Hearing a voice behind me, I turned around to see a policeman. My body froze over.

Oh no, I was right! I'm going to get arrested!

While I was still frozen with fear, the policeman took my hand and said, "Don't be scared. Are you hurt?"

I was so scared I thought I would die on the spot.

In the meantime, Honoka kept running on her own.

"Is there another!? This one's pretty stubborn!"

I could do nothing but pray that Honoka could save herself.

Eventually, Honoka vanished from sight, taking advantage of the shrine's complicated architecture and her own tag expertise.

I followed the policeman to the shrine office and sat there, wrapped in a borrowed towel and sipping *amazake* while waiting for him to read out my prison sentence.

The policeman eventually reappeared with a bothered expression on his face and said, "Well, we're in a spot of trouble here. We couldn't find any sign of that other girl. We actually came to the Kanda Myoujin shrine because we heard there was a robbery tonight and the culprit fled here, but we haven't seen them, either. Do you have any idea where that girl might be? We'd better find her before anyone else d-"

I charged out of the office without a word.

Behind me, I hear the policeman shout, "Hey, wait, where are y-"

No, I don't have time to wait

Honoka's in danger, Honoka's in danger, Honoka's in danger!

I chanted those words repeatedly, like a spell.

It's strange. I couldn't move an inch when I was running away, but now that I'm doing it for Honoka, I'm running like the wind.

I can no longer remember where I went and how I got there.

It felt like an instant and like eternity, at the same time.

At any rate, I found her eventually.

She was hiding the thicket next to the donation box where it all began. When I asked afterwards, she said that once the ghost came out, there couldn't possibly be any ghosts left there. The usual, incomprehensible Honoka logic.

"Umi Umi Umi Umi..."

Honoka grabbed me tight, as tears and snot ran down her face. I embraced her in return and said to her, "It's okay, Honoka. That wasn't a ghost or anything, it was a policeman. The same one who works at the police box where we always play ta-

"Umi Umi Umi Umi Umi"

Wiping her tears and snot off on me, it seems she was unable to hear anything I said. As I watched her, I started crying too. The two of us bawled our heads off until our parents came to pick us up.

We were crying so hard that our parents surmised we had gone through some terrifying experience, and so they took us back, ignoring for the most part that we had run away from home. However, Honoka refused to let go of me, so in the end she ended up staying the night at my house.

How did she ever forget this? Perhaps she had unconsciously wished to forget. But,

For me, it was a valuable learning experience.

It taught me that whenever Honoka asks me to do something, she always ends up causing an unreasonable amount of havoc.

♡♡♡♡♡

"Um, Honoka, I've been meaning to tell you this, but that rustling in the thicket that day was probably a cat or robber, not a gh- " I say, looking next to me.

Zzzzz...

Honoka is already fast asleep.

*Oh my.*

I sit up a little and stare into Honoka's face.

Though it may sound a little clichéd, we couldn't leave each other even if we wanted to. Whenever either one of us was in trouble, we've always helped each other out. And, you've become essentially family to me, without me even realizing it. It feels strange. Considering how unapproachable I am, it must be because of this place that I have such priceless friends like Honoka and Kotori.

No, not just those two.

I have all the rest of μ's.

It was because I was born in this city, and raised in it.

The time we spent in this environment created the friends I have today.

I am a product of our time here.

And, my everlasting memories here are a treasure that nothing can ever destroy.

Honoka, I'll never allow you to quit μ's, no matter what you say.

I shall support you in difficult times.

Of course, further down the path we're taking,

There will be times when you break down, times when you cry, times when you want to run away, and times when you can't take anymore.

And, there will be days when dark clouds appear overhead and block out the radiance of your dreams.

But, I will support you, always.

Until the golden luminance of the sun shines across the blue skies and down upon you once more.

Why?

I don't know the reason myself. I think it is because I share the same feelings you do.

I can still hear your voice from the day you were crying, "Umi, Umi, Umi, Umi."

Honoka,

I love μ's, I love Otonoki Academy, and somewhere down the line, I've started enjoying being a school idol.

And, I love everyone around us.

Our friends with whom we share a common dream.

Now, we can break through anything in our way.

Let's run together, beyond the stars we saw in the sky that night at the Kanda Myoujin. I want to truly become a star, and protect Otonoki.

And the people precious to me...

Honoka sleeps soundly beside me.

The next morning, Honoka vigorously scarfs down two servings of my mother's breakfast.

As always, my mother jokes, "How about you become our daughter already?"

And, as always, Honoka responds, "Sure I will!"

Before we leave for school, Yukiho arrives with a delivery of things Honoka forgot, and she accepts them eagerly.

"See you later♪"

That smile she wears as she shouts back towards my house is something I could never possibly match, I think.

And for some reason, I laugh.

The two of us have been friends since we were still in our mothers' bellies.

I know that even after we grow up, even after we reach middle age, and even after we're old and gray, we'll be together with one another for an eternity.

Always, and forever.



### Comments♡Hanayo

The energetic and cheerful Honoka and the cool and sharp Umi seem like polar opposites at first glance, but they've actually been best friends since forever ago, and I really admire the two of them. They have such different auras and ways of thinking, but whenever push comes to shove, it's like they can communicate just by looking into each other's eyes, without even saying anything. They're so dazzling, it makes me kind of jealous. I hope I can be together with them forever too♡

